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ABSTRACT

Approximately one-fourth of those involved in adult learning live in rural areas. A survey of programs serving rural adult learners reveals that no one educational provider or program seems best suited to provide services to rural communities. What successful providers have in common are programs which: (1) respond to a specific societal need, (2) respond to the adult learner's expectations, (3) involve extensive cooperation with other agencies, and (4) offer concise and jargon-free descriptive materials. The availablity of educational services in rural areas has been hampered by the increased costs involved in delivering services. Federal and state policy makers need to explore strategies that will (1) remove many of the barriers to continued education faced by adult learners. (2) remove the urban bias that has denied equal access to educational services to rural residents, (3) encourage inter-institutional collaboration among both formal and non-formal educational providers, and (4) develop a rural education policy that is integrated into rural economic development policy. Rural educators need to act as advocates in accomplishing these legislative and policy objectives and explore collaborative arrangements with other providers. (Author)

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POSTSECONDARY AND ADULT EDUCATION

IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

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and

Sue C. Maes

National Rural Education Forum

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POSTSECONDARY AND ADULT EDUCATION IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

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Paper prepared for the U.S. Department of Education 1985 National Rural Education Forum held in Kansas City, Missouri, August 1985.

National Rural Education Forum

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ABSTRACT

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The availability of educational services in rural areas has been hampered by the increased costs involved in delivering services. Federal and state policy makers need to explore strategies that will (1) remove many of the barriers to continued education faced by adult learners, (2) remove the urban bias that has denied equal access to educational services to rural residents, (3) encourage inter-institutional collaboration among both formal and non-formal educational providers, and (4) develop an rural education policy that is integrated into rural economic development policy. Rural educators need to act as advocates in accomplishing these legislative and policy objectives and explore collaborative arrangements with other providers.

POSTSECONDARY AND ADULT EDUCATION IN RURAL COMMUNITIES

Contrasted with other fields in American education, rural adult education is yet an emerging discipline. While we can trace its roots back more than a century to the development of land-grant institutions and cooperative extension networks, the field of rural adult education that emerges today is increasingly diverse. With the support of the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education (FIPSE), the Action Agenda Project has spent the past two years exploring this diversity - asking what, within the discipline of adult education, is special about rural and what, within the discipline of rural education is special about adults. As an emerging discipline, rural adult education does not yet have a firmly established research base. What we wish to share with you today is a synthesis of current writing in the field, some exploratory research conducted on both students and programs, and the insights shared by some 200 participants at regional conferences on rural adult education held throughout the country this past year.

Before examining the state of the art in rural adult education, we need to make a few introductory remarks about the diverse disciplines from which rural adult education has evolved and the tensions this diversity has spawned. As a distinct discipline, rural adult education draws together practitioners from both higher education and public school education, from both service and academic

traditions, from both formal institutions and informal grassroots organizations, from both professional and occupational education, from both rural improvement and economic development concerns. Seen through the lens of rural development, rural adults need the knowledge required to create an economic base and provide the basic services required to sustain a community. Seen through the lens of higher education, rural adults offer a new market to help compensate for declining enrollments. Seen through the lens of public education, rural adults are a generation of Americans shortchanged by public education - a generation whose lack of skills inhibit their own and their children's development. Seen through the lens of grassroots organizations, rural adults articulate interests and needs that remain unmet or misunderstood by traditional educational organizations. Seen through the lens of lifelong learning, rural adults are a segment of the population isolated by virtue of distance or topography from the educational services they will continue to demand throughout their lifetimes.

These multiple images create some tensions or ambiguities that must be acknowledged at the outset - ambiguities regarding whose interests are to be served, what unit to consider in evaluating need and what criteria to use in judging educational quality.

Historically, rural adult education addressed the needs of agrarian communities. In addition to increasing the

agricultural output of the nation, cooperative extension networks sought to strengthen and preserve rural communities. The "rural turnaround" that resulted from the urban outmigration in the 1970s has led many to predict that distinctions between rural and urban may fade by the turn of the century (Treadway, 1984). Educational providers remain divided between concerns for preserving rural communities and lifestyles and desires to facilitate what they see to be the inevitable urbanization of rural life. Related to this is an ambiguity regarding the unit of analysis. Traditional institutions typically survey the needs of individuals in designing educational services. Some grassroots and community organizations analyze the community as a whole, arguing that the welfare of the individual depends on the health of the community. Historically, land-grant colleges and cooperative extension networks were designed to address a national need for increased agricultural production. Educational providers remain divided on the unit of analysis - individual, community or nation - which best serves the needs of rural areas.

Finally, issues of quality loom ever large. Adult education in general faces concerns with quality assessment of both credit and non-credit courses. Of late, attention has been focused on assuring quality in credit courses (Cross and McCartan, 1984). Questions of quality assume yet another dimension when viewed through the lens offered

by grassroots organizations. Tax dollars flow through credentialed institutions and student aid is tied to degree-seeking goals. Yet frills like cake decorating can turn into successful business ventures, illiteracy can sometimes be conquered more easily away from the classroom, and an experienced small business owner can provide more valuable information than a fully accredited business administration course. Issues of credit and degrees pale in comparison with the pressing needs for rural empowerment.

State of the Art

In describing the state of the art of rural adult education we would like to: (1) review demographic research conducted on rural adult learners, (2) survey the diversity of providers and programs now serving rural areas, and (3) highlight policy issues raised by providers serving rural areas. Our description assumes the distinction between SMSAs (Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas) and non-SMSAs as the definition of rural. This classifies as rural those who live on a farm, in open countryside, or in isolated communities of fewer than 50,000.

1. Demographic Research on Rural Adult Learners

While most of the descriptors of rural communities are familiar to you, we would like to highlight a few that are especially relevant to our discussion. Residents of rural communities are generally older, have fewer years of formal

schooling, are increasingly less involved in farming, and pay lower taxes and receive fewer services in exchange (Treadway, 1984). While rural residents within a community are more likely to be alike than their urban counterparts, rural communities are more likely to differ from one another than urban cities (Barker, 1985). Finally, rural communities as a whole are more likely to have a high incidence of poverty, poor transportation systems and substandard housing, and isolation from adequate medical and educational services (Treadway, 1984; Barker, 1985). While some of the problems of rural poverty result from more recent changes in the American economy, others are persistent and long-standing.

In a recent demographic study, Roger McCannon provides the most comprehensive look at the interests, characteristics, motivations and participation patterns of rural adult learners (McCannon, 1985). Rural adult learners comprise nearly twenty-seven percent of the nation's adult learners. When contrasted with their urban counterparts, rural adult learners are remarkably similar on all variables examined - age and sex, reason for participation in adult education, subjects enrolled in, type of provider, number of courses taken and source of payment. In sharp contrast to earlier studies which suggested that rural adults either weren't interested or pursued only courses for remedial or recreational purposes (Hamilton, 1976), McCannon's more recent study identified

occupational advancement or personal development as the primary reasons rural adults pursue education. The obstacles to education most frequently cited include distance, costs, time, self-confidence, conflicts with job and lack of desired courses. Rural adults expressed needs for financial aid, information, time-off from work, and family support services. They preferred late afternoon and evening classes, week-end courses and clustered courses. Despite these similarities in need and participation patterns, Barker speculates that substantial differences in access, affordability, and acceptance conspire to make continuing education more difficult for rural adults to acquire (Barker, 1985).

2. Educational Providers and Programs

As mentioned earlier, educational practice in rural adult education can be described as diverse - diverse in provider, content and method of delivery. In a survey of model programs in rural adult postsecondary education (Hone, 1985), Karen Hone described continuing education programs, community college programs, job training programs, professional development programs, community education programs, adult basic education programs, rural focused curricula and community development programs. Sponsoring agencies include four-year colleges and universities, governmental agencies, nonprofit associations and organizations, private schools, regional libraries, research institutes, state departments of education,

student cooperatives, community colleges, vocational-technical institutes and variety of consortial arrangements. In the wake of such diversity, we can only hope to offer a brief sketch of educational practice in rural adult education and draw some generalizations from their successes.

By virtue of longevity alone, the Cooperative Extension Service (CES) has been an acknowledged leader in rural adult education. Consisting of a network that includes the U.S. Department of Agriculture, land-grant universities, and county extension offices, the CES has program emphases that include agriculture, natural resources, environment, home economics, community development, and the 4H youth program. While their program emphases are broad, services in many states have focused on agriculture. Representative of a more expanded view of CES are programs in Iowa, Idaho and Kentucky. The CES at Iowa State University offers a series of programs and services directed at the economic development of communities, including help in conducting trade area analyses. Idaho has involved their CES in offering a computer literacy course in rural communities. County extension agents work with county advisory boards in selecting and training peer teachers recruiting students and evaluating classes. Kentucky's CES has established the SOS Learning Network, a system of community learning and development programs in sixteen communities. The CES provide administrative support services while volunteer

teachers, the teenager down the block who knows how to rebuild a motorcycle or the young couple who built their own house for $15,000, provide the knowledge and experience. Thousands of Kentuckians have become SOS shareres and have spread nonformal learning throughout the state. Other examples exist. With a staff in excess of 18,000 operating in 3150 counties in the United States (Killacky, 1984), CES provides states with a valuable resource in serving rural adults.

Having been formed with a mandate for community service, community colleges often act as primary educational providers in rural areas. Some have fallen into traditional patterns, focusing resources on 18-20 year olds as part of statewide systems. Others have taken seriously the charge to serve their communities and constantly explore ways of better serving rural areas. Mid-Plains Community College in Nebraska operates a Mobile Metals Van, Otero Junior College operates a Career Van throughout rural Colorado; and the Community College System at the University of Kentucky rotates a dental hygiene program about five rural sites. Mountain Empire Community College in Virginia has facilitated and coordinated a community development program that includes a clothing manufacturing cooperative, a historical association, cooperative planning by community and area service agencies, and an education program with an enviable track record in adult education. The Community College of

Vermont serves the entire state of Vermont through ten offices located in communities throughout the state. Each office conducts its own needs assessments, recruits local teachers, publicizes course offerings, and maintains student records. This community college system offers rural areas access to low-cost postsecondary education.

Four year colleges and universities have developed a variety of strategies to reach rural areas. Some, like the Coal Institute at Clarion University and the Indian Bilingual Teacher Training Program offered by Eastern Montana College respond to targeted populations in their states. Others, like Eastern Oregon State College, offer extensive programs and flexibility to rural residents within its service area, coordinating services with area community colleges. The Nebraska Business Development Center supported by the University of Nebraska at Omaha links university resources with small businesses in rural communities, providing analyses and support services.

Most distance delivery systems have been developed at colleges and universities. The University of Wisconsin Extension Service supports a complete audioconference system. California State University at Chico uses an Instructional Television Fixed Services system to deliver both academic and student services to remote sites. A number of colleges and universities use audio and videotapes and are exploring uses of computer technology. Among the more comprehensive programs that are based on

technology is that offered by the University of Alaska. Composed of 250 communities of which only 30 are accessible by road, by necessity Alaska has had the most experience in using distance delivery systems. Rural education centers staffed by coordinators handle the academic planning, program implementation and student services for that site. Face to face interactions accompany the course offerings broadcast through the LERN Alaksa Instructional Network, the Audio-Conferencing Network, and Teletext systems.

Community based organizations are yet another category of educational providers serving rural areas. These programs have been more difficult to locate, primarily because they operate on shoestring budgets. But their impact in rural communities can be substantial. Kansas supports the development of community education programs designed and staffed by community members. Adopting the model that anyone can teach and anyone can learn, these programs have been successful in linking community resources and in acting as a catalyst for other community development activities. The Rural Development Institute, operated by the Federation for Southern Cooperatives, offers training and services related to cooperative business ventures. A host of community based programs have sprung up in the West, in response to dislocated workers and the family stress that has resulted. In many communities, these locally initiated organizations offer the swiftest means of getting information and help to rural

adults. More than any other educational provider working in rural areas, community based organizations reflect rural community needs to gain some control over their lives and their futures.

Given the importance that economic development plays in the very survival of rural communities, we could not complete our quick survey of rural adult education without highlighting some of the more innovative models. Nowhere is the integration of education and community development more obvious than in attempts to foster economic development in rural areas. A number of providers offer courses in entrepreneurship or small business evaluation services. The Nebraska Small Business Center has established small business grids which allow small business owners in isolated regions to meet periodically and draw from one another's experience.

In some regions of the United States, the barriers to economic development have been so long-standing and persistent that more integrated models have been explored. Two examples of these are the programs being developed in South Dakota and Arizona by the Seventh Generation Fund and the banking and timber programs developed by the Mountain Area Community Economic Development Corporation (MACED). Based on the failure of numerous programs that attempted top-down infusion of education, the Seventh Generation Fund has approached economic development on Indian reservation lands from a bottom-up perspective. Using a model of

economic development that is firmly rooted in respect for and stewardship of the land's natural resources, the program encourages Native Americans to approach the economic development of their lands from a community perspective, exploring all members' commitment and belief in planned development. A critical component of MACED's economic development work in Eastern Kentucky has been its success as a change agent. A program to make more affordable mortgages available and the creation of a sawmill and lumber marketing venture introduced incremental changes into the economy, changes which then created educational needs. Such models respect the resources unique to a given rural area and respect the need for education to be directly relevant to the adult's life situation.

While the models serving rural areas are diverse in content, organization and purpose, Hone (1984) attempted to identify some characteristics common to those models that have been most successful. The four common characteristics include: (1) response to a specific societal need, (2) response to the adult learner's expectations, (3) extensive cooperation with other agencies, and (4) concise and jargon-free descriptive materials. The close connection between need and educational product is, in part, what has led to the diversity of providers. To the extent that traditional educational providers are sensitive to rural community needs and have credibility among rural people,

they have been able to extend their services to rural areas. But these providers differ - they may be a public school system, a community college, a nearby private college, a land-grant university. To the extent that traditional providers are sometimes insensitive to rural needs or mistrusted by the community, grassroots organizations are born.

3. Federal, State and Institutional Policy

With regard to issues of policy, rural adult education could be addressed either through rural policy or adult education policy. A review of both fields yields little positive to report.

The Lifelong Learning Act passed as part of the 1976 Higher Education Amendments lent credibility and visiblity to adult education imperatives, but appropriated very little money (Cross and McCartan, 1984). Press releases regarding input solicited for later hearings on reauthorization of the Higher Education Act give testimony to the consideral input provided by adult education advocates, but offer little encouragement that these suggestions will actually be implemented (Palmer, 1985). The Commission on Higher Education and the Adult Learner (1984) has outlined specific suggestions aimed at increasing federal support of adult education programs and reducing financial barriers to adult learners. Similarly the National University Continuing Education Association has offered revisions designed to strengthen aid offered to

postseconday insitutions which take on the task of serving adult learners. Concern for the problems of rural adult learners are addressed through proposals to support the development of innovative delivery mechanisms. To the extent that these proposals remove barriers and offer support equally to rural and urban learners, they are supportive to rural adult education. To the extent that they continue a long tradition of population-based funding, these proposals ignore fundamental issues regarding equity of access in the wake of increased costs to deliver services to rural areas. To the extent that they offer disproportionate support to formal educational institutions, they ignore the fact that rural needs may not be amenable to solutions posed by traditional institutions. Without wanting to dilute the solidarity forged on behalf of adult learners, it is important to remember the extent to which an urban bias has dominated in the past.

Rural problems have received increased federal attention in the past decade. Commissions convened by Kennedy, Johnson and Carter explored rural education but made little mention of postsecondary education. The Rural Development Act of 1972 funneled funds through land-grant institutions and cooperative extension networks. Acknowledging the urban bias which has functioned in our country, the U.S. Department of Education announced the "Rural Education and Rural Family Education Policy for the 80s". It promises rural America ". . . an equitable

share of the information, services, assistance and funds available from and through the Department of Education and its programs." (CRESS NOTES, 1983/84) While an encouraging step, understandable concerns still exist regarding the meaning of equitable and whether attention will be directed to the needs of adults as well as to rural school districts.

National policy affecting rural adult education is at best fragmented. Treadway (1984) speaks to the need for a federal policy that distinguishes between rural and urban learners, specifically in issues regarding equity and appropriateness. Current federal criteria for allocating resources ignore the higher costs of delivering services to rural areas and overestimate the local resources available to support such services. Nearly all concerned with rural development speak to the need for a federal policy that recognizes the extent to which adult education must be integrated into community development. Isolating educational policy from rural development policy is to ignore the interrelationships between these two enterprises.

Because of widespread differences among states and institutions, it is difficult to generalize about state and institutional policies affecting rural adult education. We can, however, highlight some policy trends that affect the number and diversity of services available in rural areas.

One of the most pervasive problems arises from both

state and institutional policies toward the allocation of resources. In a survey of all 50 states, the Small Rural College Commission of the American Association of Community and Junior Colleges (AACJC) found that while 28 states reported that they compensated rural colleges for increased costs in delivering services to rural areas, only 5 states actually incorporated rural environment directly in their funding formula (Williams, 1981). Many states allocate funds on a per student basis, making no distinction among sites at which the services are being delivered. This inequity is further magnified by the extent to which institutions themselves fund programs on a numbers-driven formula. As long as funding resources are distributed and success measured in terms of a population-driven model, rural access to postsecondary education will remain severely limited.

In a recent study on adult learning, Cross and McCartan (1984) outline a conceptual framework within which current state policies toward adult learning can be analyzed. Seen through the lens of rural adult education, several examples speak eloquently of the need for state policies sensitive to rural concerns.

Cross and McCartan identify four approaches used by states: laissez faire, encouragement, intervention, and direct approach and services. The laissez faire approach continues the current urban-biased, population-driven policy so prevalent in most states. Encouragement

approaches allow the state to play the role of facilitator but not become directly involved. Given the long history of inequity, it seems unlikely that such an approach could have much effect.

Intervention and direct support services have, in some states, both encouraged and discouraged service to rural areas. Many rural education providers express the need for increased collaboration with one another and coordination of their efforts. Encouragement and intervention approaches that established coordination, helped clarify roles, and eliminated turf disputes would generally be welcomed. Regulation policies aimed at reducing duplication of services and controlling what educational services are eligible for state support can be blind to rural concerns. Off-campus centers often serve critical functions in reaching rural areas, even though they duplicate services offered at the home institution. Experience has suggested that no one provider is necessarily best suited to serve a given rural area. Consequently, state policies that seek to screen out providers limit the number of communities and rural adults they will reach. Finally, avocational and recreational courses that are most often disallowed in state funding policies are frequently cited by practitioners as the most effective way to introduce reluctant learners to the possibilities of continuing education. Adult basic education and literacy programs, for example, often build

from the trust gained in avocational and recreational courses.

Intervention and direct support approaches are most often mentioned with regard to distance delivery systems, where statewide systems often seem more cost-effective. While technology serves as a valuable ally in serving professionals in rural areas, its abilities to reach the less-educated is seriously questioned. States should not look to technology as the solution to all rural needs.

Finally, state and institutional policies need to recognize natural, not state boundaries. Many rural communities find services offered by institutions in neighboring states more accessible than those offered within their own states. Given the difficulties posed by distance and topography, state and institutional policies that do not allow reciprocity with neighboring states add yet another line of barriers to the rural adult. State policies should facilitate access ". . . based on natural geographical configurations rather than on artificial state lines." (Treadway, 1984, p.63)

4. Summary

In an effort to both summarize and synthesize our description of the state of the art, we would like to return to two questions with which we opened our paper. What, within the discipline of adult education, is special about rural? What, within the discipline of rural education, is special about adults?

In many respects, rural adult learners share the same characteristics as urban adult learners. They prefer courses that are directly relevant to their life situations, need flexibility of scheduling and course location, respond best to content that is learner driven. But there are substantial differences. The realities of distance and isolation make services more difficult to deliver - access is severely restricted. Second, expectations are lower. Richard Margolis speaks earnestly of the "incubus of ignorance and inertia" in rural America (Margolis, 1985). Having seen themselves only through urban eyes, rural Americans have been robbed of their pride - feeling condemned to an inferior life by virtue of their rural status. The urban exodus, if it continues, will simply exacerbate the problem. Resources will be directed to the professionals, to the technologically literate, to the already well educated, to the urban outmigrants.

A third difference lies embedded in the very fabric of rural poverty. Current efforts in linking economic development and postsecondary education (See for example Charner, 1984 and Charner and Rolzinski, 1985) explore important new ground for education - yet they are dominated by urban models. Seen through the lens of rural needs, economic development models must help adults create jobs, not simply train for them. As innovative as many of the collaborative models in economic development are, they pale in comparison to the more deeply integrated models needed

in rural areas. Education must chart new territory if it is to have an impact in rural areas.

What, within the field of rural education, is unique about adults? Certainly adults face the same problems of access and equity, the same need for a rural curriculum that helps them regain self-respect. What sets adults apart from young people is the characteristics of adult learners. Adults require education that is experience based, relevant to their life, at times and places manageable within adult responsibilities, and over which they have some control. Secondly, our review of successful programs suggests that no single provider is well suited for all rural communities or to serve all educational needs of a given community. Rural education must concern itself with these realities, involve these other providers in its deliberations, and explore collaborative relationships if it intends to reach the rural adult.

Analysis of Trends

Rural America is so diverse in its economies, in its communities and in its needs that it is difficult to survey trends. What we would like to share with you are some generalizations drawn from the trends and issues raised most often by rural education providers throughout the country.

1. Demographic Trends: The demographic reversal that occurred during the 1970s appears to have halted on a national basis, but may be continuing in recreational

locales. Some rural educators point to these urban outmigrants as a new, relatively sophisticated educational market and are anxious to build programs in response to their needs. Other rural educators point to the danger of urbanization of rural areas and an increased gap in educational levels, and are anxious to provide services that will help rural residents retain some control over their communities.

Projections in farm states suggest that as many as 500 rural communities in a single state could disappear in the next five years. Rural educators point to the need for services to help rural residents respond to the farm crisis and explore options for keeping their communities viable. A variety of forces point to the need for increased educational services in rural areas.

2. Economy: There seems little evidence to suggest a rapid economic recovery in rural areas. Pressures felt by farmers and a number of dislocated workers in farming, mining, and logging industries have resulted in a substantial increase in family violence and other social problems. While these problems are not unique to rural life, the array of services available in urban areas simply do not exist in rural communities. Rural educators point to the need for increased social services and economic development assistance to help rural adults cope with these pressures.

(3) Education: There are at least four areas in which

educational trends will affect rural adult education.

(a) Technology: Increased emphasis and attention is being given to distance delivery systems as a means of responding to the problems posed in serving rural areas. Rural education practitioners both support and express concern over the direction this trend may take. Distance delivery systems offer a powerful mechanism for delivering some educational services to some rural adults in some locations. However, it does not offer a solution to many of the more persistent problems in reaching rural learners. Some providers feel that technological delivery mechanisms are best suited for the already well-educated and will not be used by the under-educated. If distance delivery systems are perceived to be the rural solution, then the gap between the under- and well-educated will simply widen. Others point out that technology is expensive and will require economies of scale in order to be feasible. Low income/high costs combined with low population densities will continue to isolate rural areas from educational services. Educational providers agree that distance delivery mechanisms are worth pursuing but caution that they should not be the only model pursued in responding to rural needs.

(b) Impact of Fiscal Constraints: The fiscal constraints felt by higher education as traditional student markets decline combined with the back to basics movement has caused many institutions to narrow their focus. In a paper

presented at the Western Regional Conference on Serving the Rural Adult, Gray pointed to gradual retraction of land-grant universities to technological approaches to service and the related retreat of cooperative extension back to agriculture and home economics as one such example (Gray, 1985). Rural educators in Appalachia complain of the retreat of community colleges, choosing to be ". . . the bottom rung on the academic ladder rather than the top rung on the community ladder." (Sher, 1985) States express willingness to support education, but not the frills of avocational and recreational learning. Yet in some rural areas, these frills are the only way to open the door to extended learning. Without intervention, this narrowing of focus will have a negative impact on rural adult education.

(c) Adult Learning Movement: The adult learning movement is receiving increased attention in the newspapers and in Congress. Projects like the National Commission on Higher Education and the Adult Learner and the Project on Continuing Higher Education Leadership have been effective in articulating adult needs, pressing for policy changes needed to support adult learners, and developing effective leadership in higher education. Rural adult educators express concern that as this trend grows, the foundations in the adult education movement not be built on an urban bias. To the extent that the trend sensitizes rural colleges and universities to the needs of adults, it will be productive. To the extent that the models developed

respond only to urban problems, the rural adult learner will remain isolated

(d) Collaborative Strategies: Concerns with economic development, declining resources, and declining markets have motivated many institutions to explore collaborative relationships and strategies. This trend is extremely important to rural adult education because resources are so scarce and the types of educational providers so diverse. Rural adult educators see the trend toward collaborative strategies and coordination of activities as extremely supportive.

An Action Agenda

Based on the information we have gathered and the suggestions made by participants at our regional conferences we would like to propose the following actions:

Research

1. Research directed at creating a more complete picture of both rural adult learners and educational providers. Current data gathered by the National Center for Educational Statistics ignores some of the more informal learning situations.

2. Research directed at policy options that would be more responsive to the increased costs associated with delivering services to rural areas.

3. Research on collaborative models and methods of coordination that best serve rural communities.

4. Research that provides a more thorough study of successful programs in rural adult education.

State and Federal Policy Makers

1. Remove the urban bias from resource allocation procedures and legislation.
2. Remove the barriers to continuing education faced by

adults. We support the suggestions offered by the National University Continuing Education Association and the Commission on Higher Education and the Adult Learner.
3. Develop educational policy that is integrated with rural development policy.
4. Develop rural eductional policy and funding mechanisms that reflect the broad range of providers that serve rural areas.
5. Support the development of community education and explore models which encourage these programs to move beyond recreational activities.
6. Explore and support collaborative models and coordination procedures among the providers that serve rural areas.
7. Establish reciprocal arrangements with nearby states to encourage rural residents to take advantage of the educational services nearest their home.
8. Encourage and support models of economic development specific to rural communities.

Individual

1. Act as an active advocate in pressing for funding changes and improved reward structures for programs and personnel that serve rural areas.
2. Provide help to National Associations, state legislators and institutional leaders in examining policy and programs in terms of rural needs.
3. Explore collaborative arrangements with others concerned with and active in rural education.

During the past two years the Action Agenda Project has been collecting much of the information we have shared with you today. We hope that the work we have done provides some focus and direction for future work on behalf of rural adult learners.

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